

RESOURCES

News about nature, history and horticulture in Fairfax County

Volume 2, No. 3 Spring 2002



Jack-in-the-pulpit

Spring is All Around You!

Are you feeling that winter is lingering a bit too long? Are you ready for the light, bright surprises of early spring? Well, they are already happening — in the tiny white woodland wildflowers, in the misty green of new leaves on early trees, and in the migrating birds headed to their northern habitats. Every day brings new occasions to celebrate the return of spring. And a great place to celebrate is in the county's parks.

Start now by finding the pure-white March bloodroot and the extraordinarily varied blue clusters of April's Virginia bluebells. Pinks, yellows and purples join the whites and blues of early wildflowers that thrive beneath trees before the leaves shade their habitats.

Shorebirds began migrating in February, and now the season of "confusing spring warblers" is under way. Bright bluebirds and goldfinches prove a credit to their names, and the resident woodpeckers add to the sound and light of a new spring.

Last year *ResOURces* staff created a unique way to seek out wildflowers and birds to look for in every season. Our interactive web site can be searched by park site, by season, by species or common name of flower or bird, by color and by habitat. Try it for yourself at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources/naturefinder.htm. We hope you enjoy it!

Please remember that these natural resources in the parks are for everyone, so do not pick flowers or bother nesting birds. We all want to see these wondrous spring happenings, to have them next year and for many years to come. 🌱

The Intrepid Pohick Rangers

By Jane Scully, ResOURces Editor

Gather a group of ten-to-twelve year olds, take them into the muddy woods and streams. Let them find the amphibians and reptiles that live there. Ask them why these creatures like it in this place. Give them nets to catch, study and release wetland creatures. Show them how to do stream studies with water sampling and observation containers.

Let them discover the changes in vernal pools that at first are dominated by seeps from snowfall. Show them how to dig a trench to redirect water from runoff that is flushing out a vernal pool and flooding out frogs' eggs. Let them work in teams or separately to solve real-world conservation issues in miniature.

And they'll come back at every opportunity, given a chance to explore natural park resources under the watchful eye of a professional naturalist in the controlled park setting — activities otherwise not allowed

in the park. Many of these participants grow up into the core of volunteers that is crucial to the nature center's success. These young "Pohick Rangers" now think of nature and conservation in a personal way, having participated in resource management issues right down at — and into — the ground level.

The Pohick Ranger program is the brainchild of Mike McCaffrey of Hidden Pond Nature Center near the Pohick stream valley in Springfield. Each spring and fall, 15 elementary school students sign on for a six-part nature exploration program. Many come back on a regular basis: about 50 percent of those who sign up around age nine participate until they are twelve. Mike's own daughters have been Rangers and now volunteer for several hours a week.

"When you can get kids at that age out there,

► **Pohick Rangers** *continued on page 10*

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Spring Surprises

The Annual Collections Symposium

The role of scientific instruments in daily life is the focus of this year's annual symposium in American material culture and social history, to be held Friday, March 29, from 9 am to 3:30 pm. The seminar is titled "'Natural Philosophy'" and the Domestic Sphere: Scientific Instruments in the Early American Home, 1750-1850." Presentations cover the history of timekeeping, weather prediction, surveying and science ("natural philosophy") in early America. Exhibits and demonstrations of early clocks, barometers and other instruments accompany the program, to be held at George Mason University. Call Collections Management at 703-631-1429 for more information and to preregister.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We are delighted that our ever-expanding web site now includes archives of all the ResOURces issues published thus far. Many of the features have direct relevance now. For example, see last year's spring issue for great places to bird and see wildflowers. The archived issues are at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources, our newly available address. The old one still works, however.

We would also like to give special recognition to Barbara Naef, a remarkable force for stewardship of all our county resources, historic as well as natural, as she retires from the Park Authority after 20 years of service. Barbara has been a great supporter of ResOURces, a project that reflects her commitment to public education and interpretative effectiveness. Her constant striving for excellence has been an inspiration to us all. We will miss her energy and enthusiasm.

Jane Scully



Baby Animal Season

Meeting the farm animal babies is a highlight this time of year at Kidwell Farm at Frying Pan Park. The earliest arrival, Puff, a Holstein cow, was born in December. Sheep, pigs and goats deliver their babies during late winter and early spring. In late February six lambs and ten piglets were born and more are expected!

These wiggling, wobbly wonders, staying close to mom as they test their legs in this big new world, are a delight for children and adults alike. As well, cow milking happens every day at 4 pm in the barn. Stop by often to catch the new arrivals or call 703-437-9101 for birth updates!

NEW! Federal Period Muster at Sully

Bring your blanket and basket to enjoy a muster and picnic on Saturday, May 11, with our Federal period interpreters. Musters were traditionally a gathering time for training and socializing, and may have been an opportunity for Revolutionary War veterans to encourage younger men to take up arms to defend the new nation against the British in the War of 1812. At Sully's muster, hear period music, see a puppet show, play lawn bowls and quoits as you picnic alongside our 19th century characters. Find out what work these activities created for Sully's enslaved community. The muster takes place from noon until 4 pm. The cost is \$6 for adults and \$4 for seniors and children.

Mother's Day Special Events

Take Mom on a cruise....

Treat Mom to a special day on Sunday, May 12, at lovely Lake Accotink in Springfield! Cruise the shoreline as you listen to an interpretive history of the park, lake and area. Refreshments and snacks will be served. Cruises are held at 11 am, 1 pm, 3 pm, 5 pm and 6 pm, cancelled if weather is severe. The cost is \$7 for adults, \$3.50 for mothers, \$4 for children, babies on laps free. For price information and to reserve your spaces, call the park at 703-569-0285.

...Or to a Garden Concert

Treat your mother, daughter, sister or the whole family to an afternoon of music surrounded by beautiful spring flowers at Green Spring Gardens Park in Alexandria. Relax on the lawn while the Fairfax Woodwind Quintet plays classical and modern music in the Green Spring gazebo from 3 to 4 pm. The special event is free.

Wildflower Wanderings

For two Tuesdays in April, Hidden Oaks Nature Center will take you see wildflowers galore at some pretty special places. On April 16, join in the half-day Bluebell Bonanza as you stroll along the Bull Run River valley (wear sturdy walking shoes) to revel in the abundance of spring wildflowers. Reservations are required by April 11 and the cost is \$8. On April 30, head to Linden, Virginia, for a moderate day hike to the glorious display of trilliums and other spring wildflowers there. For both events, bring a bag lunch. The cost is \$10, and reservations are required by April 25. Call 703-941-1065 for reservations. Canceled if heavy rain.



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To receive your free copy of **RESOURCES**, fill out the form on the back cover or register directly on our web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources.htm.

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A WETLAND OVERBURDENED

SILTATION. Residents recognize the changes in streams and wetlands immediately. Scientists measure its increasingly negative effects. Public officials struggle to create better prevention policy. And yet it continues, affecting almost every stream and wetland in the county.

Siltation is the settling of eroded materials into downstream waterways, streams and wetlands. Erosion itself is a natural occurrence. While open fields and forests are porous and can absorb water from heavy storms, developed areas have considerable impervious surfaces like concrete, asphalt and other building materials. Storm water rolls off these impervious surfaces into nearby streams, flooding their banks and ripping out earth and vegetation. The increased amounts of water race into and along the streams, forcing the streams to become deeper and wider to adapt to the flow.

The fast-moving eroded material includes very fine particles called silt. Silt and larger particles gradually drop out of the murky waters, degrading the downstream habitat and filling in wetlands at greatly accelerated rates. At Huntley Meadows Park, for example, siltation has reduced water depth by over a foot in the last 15 years. It has suffered from both construction runoff at two nearby developments and now by sediment from Dogue Creek and Barnyard Run, the streams that flow into the park.

"As a regular visitor to Huntley Meadows since 1993," wrote one recent visitor, "I have noticed a steady decline in both habitat and wildlife opportunities. Water levels have dropped at an alarming rate.... Please save and restore this wonderful wetland."

In wetlands the negative effects of siltation have been clear. Wetlands act as a sponge to store water and reduce flooding, and they filter pollutants that may otherwise be carried into the Chesapeake Bay. They maintain water quality and support diverse plant and animal life and the food chain that supports them.

When silt falls out into wetlands, aquatic life in areas such as Huntley Meadows is particularly vulnerable. The number and diversity of macroinvertebrates dwindle, and aquatic life such as fish and amphibians is adversely affected. Their overall health is vital to supporting and sustaining notable wetland inhabitants such as river otter, American bittern, least bittern,

yellow-crowned night heron, king rail and pied-billed grebe, to name a few. The park's field records show a sharp decline in these species during recent years.

Planning measures to control or mitigate the effects of enormous increases in impervious surfaces have not always been effective. Many development projects built in past years had little or no storm water management requirements for offsetting storm water surge. Erosion and sediment controls have been made increasingly stringent, and sediments from construction sites have been better controlled. Yet none of these measures, even when carefully applied, has proved capable of halting the damage.

Fairfax County Supervisor Penelope A. Gross gave testimony recently to the Commission on the Future of Virginia's Environment on behalf of the Potomac Watershed Roundtable. She noted that "The area we represent is the most densely populated watershed in the Commonwealth. Unprecedented growth has exacerbated erosion and sediment control and storm water management concerns." Supervisor Gross cited aging storm water infrastructure, infill development in areas of difficult terrain or in proximity to streams, and development of farmland.

"We are discovering that existing laws and programs at both local and state levels are in need of reform," she said.

Several county and state programs are under way to improve the health of our streams, but remediation can be quite expensive. For example, at Huntley Meadows Park, \$400,000 has been allocated in the current county park bond program for erosion control, but it is estimated that at least another \$750,000 will be needed to remediate stream erosion, and that doesn't include any silt removal from the wetland. Given these costs, a concentration on developing and enforcing better storm water management may be a critical next step.

A number of agencies in the county are working on plans to address siltation and water quality issues. *ResOURces* will address some of these efforts in future issues and on *ResOURces Online*, our web site. For more information, see the county's web site and conduct a search on water-related issues.

"Siltation is one of the top natural resource issues in the county today."

Acquiring “the latest fashions” for the Home

By Susan Clark
Assistant Manager, Collections

Thinking of sprucing up the house this spring? Maybe you want new window treatments in the bedroom with matching comforter and pillow shams, slipcovers or reupholstery of an old chair. All this will probably require at least one day off from work to look at endless fabric samples and to try to imagine how the results will enhance your home. Sounds like an exciting challenge to some and an opportunity for an anxiety attack for others.

Now, imagine attempting this task during the 18th century, before the American Revolution, when the term “impulse shopping” was non-existent. Immense changes in the production of textiles occurred throughout the 18th century in Europe and America. This created a great impact on the various qualities, styles, types and colors of fabrics available for early American home decorations during this period, including the affordability and accessibility of printed textiles later in the century.

If you had the means to have *any* fine imported textiles in your home in the 18th century, your economic level was considered elite. You moved in the same social circle with the Lees of Sully, the Mosses of Green Spring, the Masons of Gunston and, of course, the Washingtons of Mount Vernon, just to name a few.

And, by the way, there were only a few. Imported furniture textiles were valuable possessions, a measure of status. They were expensive, as indicated in period probate inventories of the wealthy.

There was textile production in America by the middle of the 18th century. Viewed as “inferior,” these fabrics formed the inventory available in local shops for the “middling classes.” In more modest homes, fabrics were made from what could be grown, harvested, spun, woven and fabricated. But most buyers continued to prefer, where possible, imported fabrics from England even after the economic and political ties were severed. A little thing like a war couldn’t stand in the way of fashion!

Before the 1760s there were numerous selections of heavily woven velvets, brocades, damasks, wools, silks and tapestries but in very limited color ranges using plant-based dyes that faded quickly. Then the brilliantly colored lightweight cottons called *chintz* (spotted cloth) were introduced from India. English manufacturers began to imitate these flowing naturalistic flowered prints using the copperplate method

of applying color to lightly colored backgrounds.


Custom orders were the prescribed method for Americans who wished to acquire “well chosen” quality “dry goods” in the “latest fashion,” and requiring a serious financial commitment through their European representative or “agent” made well in advance of delivery — sometimes over a year later!

Custom ordering was full of hazards.

With no guarantee of results, customers could request required yardage, type of weave and fiber content in the preferred colorways but the final outcome was always in question. Then there was always a concern that the ship carrying your custom order could sink. Or, worse yet, tastes might change during this interval and your style of fabric or color would fall “out of fashion.”

After your order, hopefully complete and still in good taste, made its way to a major east coast port (perhaps Philadelphia, Alexandria or Baltimore), it went by a smaller vessel to a town near your local merchant store or directly to the upholsterer’s shop. Once the upholsterer had completed the preliminary work, he then made arrangements for the final delivery by horse and wagon to your door, bringing with him all the required materials, hardware and assistants necessary to finalize the project.

As your special guests, the upholsterer and his apprentice or indentured servant assembled the “bed furniture” on site. This grand undertaking included a compilation of over 50 yards of fabric, 100 yards of tapes, cords, lace, trims and fringe and collections of mahogany pulleys, silk tassels, iron rings and rods — all essential to complete the “well-dressed” bed and chamber.

Then, at last, your “best chamber” *en suite* with matching bed hangings, counterpane (bedspread), “chair cases” (slipcovers) and window curtains would be ready to show off at your next social occasion. Just like today. 



Chintz fabrics (above) brought new color and lightness to fabrics in the mid-18th century, when the bergere chair (top) was all the rage.



Ladybug Beetles: *Beautiful Backyard Bullies*

By Suzanne Holland, Naturalist, Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Remember cupping a ladybug in your closed hand and chanting, "Fly away, fly away, fly away home," just before tossing the delicate creature high into the air? Childhood memories are made of these innocent moments. While ladybugs, or more accurately ladybird beetles (*Coccinellidae*), look like genteel garden guests, their appearance belies their true nature. Voracious, aggressive and toxic, ladybugs are a fearsome force in the insect world.

Here at Hidden Oaks Nature Center, we celebrate the ladybug through several spring programs for three-to-eight-year-olds. Last year over 800 school children came to hear about the marvels of metamorphosis in our "Growth and Change" and "It's a Real Bug's Life" programs. The highlight of every class field trip is the release of each child's own ladybug into the Virginia Native Wildflower Garden. Squeals of delight fill the air as the ladybugs take flight in search of aphids or scale insects to rid from our gardens.

Throughout the world people venerate ladybugs. Legend states that the name ladybird beetle, or "beetle of our lady" was bequeathed in the Middle Ages as a dedication to the Virgin Mary after she sent the insects in answer to a prayer. Other countries have similarly honorific names including Flower Lady (China), Good News (Iran) and Lord God's Little Fatty (Switzerland).

Admiration for the ladybug is clear from the array of magical powers attributed to this common beetle. In Austria, the ladybug is said to produce fair weather upon request. In Switzerland, it is the ladybug, not the stork, that delivers human babies. In Central Europe, if a maiden catches a ladybug and lets it crawl across her hand, she will marry within the year.


Ladybug luck is also celebrated globally. Farmers glorify the beetle for its prodigious appetite for aphids, a serious crop pest. In its one-year lifetime, one ladybug can eat 5,000 aphids. With females each laying as many as 1,000 eggs, the offspring from a single ladybug could consume 200,000 aphids in a season.

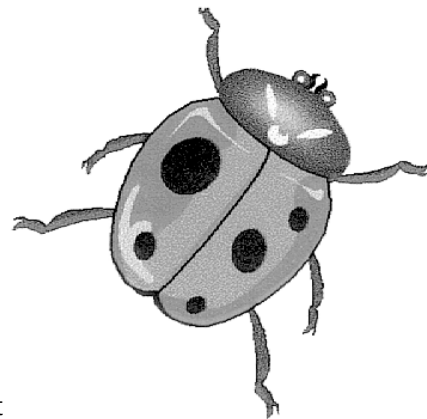
Despite childhood traditions, one cannot discern a ladybug's age by counting its spots. In fact, not all of our ladybugs are the common red with black spots. In fact, these garden guardians include 5,000 different species! Ladybugs can be spotted or plain. They come in colors as different as red, black, yellow and orange, warning colors (think stoplights) to predators of their toxicity.

With their hard outer wings, called *elytra*, covering their delicate inner flight wings, beetles can thrive in harsh environments. This outer armor is just the beginning of its protective forces. When irritated, the ladybug flips over and secretes a foul-smelling yellow liquid from its legs, usually driving away the would-be attacker. Even humans can detect the potent smell when ladybugs swarm.

Ladybugs go through a complete metamorphosis, similar to butterflies. The young look surprisingly different from the adults. The black body is long and speckled with red dots. The six legs are splayed to the side. Also partial to aphids, the larvae can each consume 300 pests per day.

As spring returns, so do the ladybugs and the school children to Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Within a few weeks we explore the eggs, larvae, pupae and adults, all on a single multi-flora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) bush along the Old Oak Trail. The popular programs are designed to help teachers address many of the Standards of Learning for Kindergarten through third grade. See our web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources and select Hidden Oaks on the Sites button to find the "Spring 2002 Program Menu."

Visit Hidden Oaks this spring to witness the marvel of metamorphosis for yourself and discover more amazing facts about our local ladybugs. Ask a naturalist for information on how to introduce these natural pest controllers into your garden. 



*"Fly away,
fly away,
fly away
home..."*

Celebrating Wetlands Awareness

By Kitty Keller, Huntley Meadows Park



It seems like the dawn of a typical May morning at Huntley Meadows as birders search the wetland for spring migrants. In the stillness it's hard to imagine what is about to unfold during Huntley's annual celebration of Wetlands Awareness Day.

The volunteers start to arrive and take their places. They pack up their specimens and binoculars for the trek to the boardwalk or take one last inventory of prizes for the fun fair and practice their hand at the games. Although the event doesn't start until noon, the public curiously peeks in as the stage is set.

The folk music begins and creates a festive backdrop to the visitor center, which is now bustling with excited children ten steps ahead of their parents. Laughter fills the woods around the fun fair as a child tests his aim at the cattail ring toss. Cheers erupt as someone wins the coveted prize at the cakewalk. Children sit excitedly as their faces and hands are decorated with wetland creatures. And Great Blue Heron struts along, quizzing kids about wetland facts.

Down the trail visitors old and young hold their breath as they make eye contact with a teethered great horned owl, which stares boldly back at visitors, inspiring questions about raptor conservation. Out on the boardwalk, interpreters with spotting scopes show young naturalists the patterns on a turtle's shell and the red eyes of a wood duck. Children squeal as they make their first gooey acquaintance with wetland muck and giggle as they try to hold a conversation with a boisterous mallard.

The day wraps up with the chatter of volunteers and staff as they share their educational victories. Gradually the stillness of the morning returns and natural sounds refill the air. A frog calls and geese announce their presence. There is a sense of comfort knowing that today some of these children took home a valuable lesson about the importance of wetlands for wildlife and for clean water. And there were some who fell in love with the magic of this place, who left the park today already anticipating their return.

Wetlands Awareness Day at Huntley Meadows is on Sunday, May 5, from noon to 3 pm. Come join us!



HOP TO IT!

Ann Korzeniewski

Assistant Site Administrator, Colvin Run Historic Site

There's plenty of hoppin' at Colvin Run Mill Historic Site to get for the annual Easter Egg Hunt, scheduled this year on Saturday, March 23. The popular event is for egg hunters as young as three and up to nine years old. To make sure that even the littlest searchers find some of the wonderfully decorated eggs, they are divided by age into three groups. Each group has a special area to search.

A whopping 50 dozen (600!) eggs are bought, boiled and dyed by volunteers who bring their artistic talents to the project. They sometimes use sponge-painting techniques to decorate the eggs and sometimes experiment with multi-color effects. Hiding the hundreds of eggs takes only a few minutes.

Before the hunt begins, the children will gather in the barn to hear seasonal tales from that ever-popular storyteller, Mason Talespinner, and to make crafts. The Easter Bunny will pay a visit to the eager basket-wielding kids.

Then, in as much time as it takes to read about it — the hunt is over! Kids race around filling their baskets with colorful eggs, then head back to the barn for more stories, a taste of the Bunny's candy and to finish that one last craft activity.

This year's program will be held on Saturday, March 23, from 1 to 3 pm. Pre-paid reservations are required and tickets are \$4 per child. Kids need to bring their own baskets. The egg hunt begins at 2 pm and other activities are ongoing. Please call Colvin Run Mill at 703-759-2771 for information.



SPRINGTIME HOUSEKEEPING AT SULLY

Sully introduces a variety of programs this spring concentrating on foodways, housekeeping and daily life. Each program includes a guided tour.

🌿 Food preparation was one of many chores performed by Sully's enslaved residents. On Sunday, March 10, our cooks working in both the original 18th century kitchen and the slave quarter will be preparing soups using root vegetables and the meager leftovers from the summer storage.

🌿 On Saturday, March 23, make a formal calling card and pay a call on the ladies of the house. Walk down to the slave quarter and learn how the enslaved African-Americans "got the word" on community news.

🌿 On Saturday, April 6, help pound, bruise and mix herbs and other useful items to make the concoctions used to clean up an 18th century household mess! Learn from Robert Roberts' book of 1827 "everything requisite for a house servant to understand." Discover 200-year-old household hints that may have been used by Sully's domestic slaves, Madam Juba, Patty and Ludwell.

🌿 On Saturday, April 25, come to the dairy and observe butter being churned and the draining, pressing and stringing up of the cheese.

🌿 On Saturday, May 18, bring your gloves and help us weave the waddling fence that protects the slave quarter garden.

These programs are held from 1 to 4 pm and the cost is \$5 for adults, \$4 for students and \$3 for seniors and children.

Here and There, Now and Then

By Jim Pomeroy, Hidden Pond Manager

One of the reasons I like spring wildflowers so much is that they are *anticipated*. I can look forward to them because they appear in the same place, at the same time, year after year. By contrast, summer wildflowers, mostly annuals and bi-annuals, are unpredictable. Sometimes unkindly called weeds, summer wildflowers are adapted to take advantage of what would normally be a temporary condition in this part of the country — an opening in the forest canopy. They flourish a year or two if conditions permit, then are usually replaced by some other plant.

By contrast most spring wildflowers require a stable environment such as a forest where things change little from year to year. Most bloom during that brief period in spring when the sun warms things up but the trees do not yet shade the forest floor. As soon as the soil thaws, these woodland flowers, often called ephemerals, send up

their leaves and flowers. If there is ever a period of frantic activity in the plant world, this is it. The woods floor may be carpeted with flowers crowded bulb to root, sepal to petal, leaf to stem, all clamoring for the attention of pollinating bees and flies. By the time the trees send forth their leaves, many of the ephemerals have withdrawn entirely back into the soil.

Erythronium americanum, commonly known as trout lily, is typical and found in every stream valley woodland. The nodding flower rises on a six-inch stalk from between two leathery, mottled green and brownish-purple leaves. The petals and sepals, three of each, fold back upon themselves; the brighter the sun, the more they fold back. Here in Fairfax County we can expect to see them perhaps as early as the last week of March, but they will certainly be gone by the third week of April.

When the right time arrives in the spring



I can walk out the door with my camera and try for the perfect picture of a trout lily. I am not sure why I find a walk in the woods restorative; I may be certain that my trout lilies will be where I expect them, but until I see them I will not *know* it. The patch will be there but always with some difference, or alteration.

A good walk in the woods is like good music — the right combination of what is anticipated and what is surprise.

Interpreting the History of John S. Mosby

By John Shafer, Assistant Manager, Hidden Oaks Nature Center

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

When I came to Hidden Oaks in 1993, I inherited an interpretive program about the life and adventures of John S. Mosby. To travel to locations that were significant in Mosby's adult life, we used a van, a kind of mobile platform that provided a great way to interpret the movements of a Confederate cavalry commander. So spring of 1994 found me riding along with my predecessor to observe how he interpreted the life of this soldier and lawyer. Little did I realize where this simple event would lead me.

A little background first. John Singleton Mosby was a 125-pound lawyer in southern Virginia in 1860 who found himself having to choose sides on the issue of secession. Although he had spoken out publicly against withdrawing from the Union, he followed his native state's leadership on the issue once Virginia adopted the articles of secession. Speaking to the *Bristol News* editor about his turn of political loyalties, Mosby said, "When I talked in such a manner, Virginia had not seceded. She is out of the Union now. Virginia is my mother, God bless her. I can't fight against my mother, can I?"

Mosby would serve with the Confederate Army throughout the entire Civil War, first under "Grumble" Jones, then as a scout for J.E.B. Stuart. In December of 1863 Stuart gave Mosby his own command of Cavalry, the 43rd Battalion. Mosby's command gathered intelligence for Stuart and Lee while disrupting Union supply and communication lines. He defined a tactic of warfare that has been used in all wars since.



*"Virginia is my mother,
God bless her. I can't fight
against my mother, can I?"*

The more I learn about Mosby's life and personality, the more intriguing a character he becomes for me. Whether he was legally representing former slaves or breaking up government corruption, he continuously followed what he thought was the fair and just course, even if it meant public ridicule and personal attacks.

Mosby had eyes that with a glance could equally strike fear in the heart of armed opponents of greater strength or stop a grandchild from misbehaving on the front porch. He taught his war-learned cavalry techniques to a young pony-riding George S. Patton, Jr., hero of World War II. Mosby personally served six presidents in varied government positions, including acting as U.S. Consul to Hong Kong. And

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as an old man, he would get up and leave a dinner party in the middle of the meal if he felt the conversation was not stimulating enough.

These are just a few of the characteristics and quirks of this remarkable historic figure. To my delight I continue to discover new facets to his story. Each new piece of research becomes another wipe across a steamed-up windshield, allowing the actual events to come into clearer focus. These insights are the extra ingredients that so improve the stew. The story of Mosby that I can interpret to the public deepens in flavor with each new revelation. My most recent find is, to my surprise, one that took place within a stone's throw of my own park.

On August 25, 1864, Mosby tried to take control of a Federal fort at what is now the intersection of Hummer Road and Little River Turnpike, within the sound of a gunshot from Hidden Oaks Nature Center. While a head-on conflict such as this was not Mosby's style of warfare, he attacked the fort by firing 30 to 40 artillery and cannon shots. Despite the onslaught, the fort's defenders would not surrender. (A more detailed story of the attack can be found on the *ResOURces Online* web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources and select *Local History*.)

Now, with this example in hand, I can include more about the history that took place so close to our park. This year's spring van trips take place on Tuesday, May 21, and Friday, June 7. Call Hidden Oaks at 703-941-1065 for reservations and more information. 🌱

A Gardener's Spring Fever

By Cindy Brown, Interpretative Horticulturist, Green Spring Gardens Park

You can see it in their eyes — the dreamy, far away look gardeners get when they think of spring. Long winter afternoons are spent yearning over the pages of seed catalogs, measuring the merits of new introductions against the attributes of trustworthy heirlooms. Nostalgia versus novelty. Visions of coralbells, phlox, larkspur and poppies soothe chilled chlorophyll enthusiasts. I participate in the annual catalog frenzy, but I limit my lusting to edible species.

Catalogs are filled with petunia, geranium and aster cultivars, but I flip by the seductive colors and quickly find the “important” seeds. Peppers, corn, squash and beans — these are a few of my favorite things. I am easily seduced by the luscious photos and regret my limited kitchen gardening space.

As I decide what delectables I will grow, I think about the meager selection of winter vegetables found in the grocery store. I prefer seasonal vegetables that are locally grown instead of the imported cardboard imitations. The idea of eating “fresh” tomatoes in December or watermelon in January is abhorrent. Consequently, I eat a lot of vegetables that have a long storage life: winter squash, potatoes and carrots.

Seed ordering occurs at winter's end. Craving the fresh spring crops, I find myself salivating over pictures of plump peas, crisp lettuce heads, and verdant, green asparagus spears. When I receive the new seed packets in the mail, I know I will soon enjoy the first bowl of pasta and fava beans.


The familiar heralds of spring, including daffodils, tulips and forsythia, remind me to plant peas, onions and garbanzo beans. Overwintering vegetables such as spinach, leeks and kale will help sustain my cravings until my favorites are ready to harvest.

The first spears of my asparagus are plucked and consumed before anyone else notices their emergence. Chive stems are eagerly cut and enliven many meals, including omelets and baked potatoes. I gather mustard blossoms, spinach, chicory and dandelion leaves to make a spring salad that shakes off the winter cobwebs.

However, all these pleasures pale in comparison to the enjoyment I receive from my favorite spring vegetable: PEAS! The first few pods never make it to the kitchen. You'll find me sitting between the rows stuffing my face. I feel like a three-year-old stealing from the cookie jar eating as many as I can before I get caught. Fresh, steamed or sautéed, I've never met a pea I didn't like. Well, except for those aliens they put in a can.

The variety of vegetables available in the spring garden — but not in the grocery store — is astonishing. If I have stimulated your appetite for more information, stop by Green Spring Gardens and visit the Kitchen Garden. Volunteers actually consume the vegetables, the product of their work. But they will be glad to share growing tips.

Or perhaps a class will help you develop a green thumb and heighten your appreciation for fresh vegetables. Green Spring offers many great gardening classes and workshops. Call them at 703-642-5173 or visit their web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp/index.htm.

Developing an interest in vegetable gardening is healthy. However, if you become a fresh-vegetable lover like me, you too may find your winter afternoons next year lost in dreams of picking spring's first edible delights. 



“Fresh, steamed or sautéed, I’ve never met a pea I didn’t like. Well, except for those aliens they put in a can.”



Put a spring in your step!

By Erin Chernisky,
Volunteer Coordinator

Are you looking for a fun activity to help shake away the winter doldrums? Try volunteering! Volunteering at a local park can enliven your senses while you acquire new skills, expand your knowledge and invest in your community. There are myriad volunteer opportunities available including:

Touring Docent —

Help others discover their heritage! Volunteers are needed to lead small groups on tours of Colvin Run Mill and Sully Historic Site. Afraid you don't know enough to be a tour guide? Don't worry, the energetic park staff will provide the training. All you need is an interest in history and the ability to interact well with others. Weekday and weekend opportunities are available. After initial training, the preferred time commitment is one five-hour shift a month.

History not your cup o' tea? Visit our web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/volunteers or call Erin Chernisky at 703-324-8750 to learn more about the variety of volunteer opportunities with the many different parks. It's time to stop hibernating and get involved with a rewarding and enriching volunteer experience! 🌱

► Pohick Rangers *continued from page 1*



their differences disappear in a love of nature," says Mike McCaffrey, who's been running the program since 1992. "They are all doing hands-on work, getting wet and dirty, and they are not thinking about how their hair or clothes look." The animated group develops a comfortable, unself-conscious relationship with each other and the staff.

Watching Mike lead a group into the forest to explore for insects, using sticks to dig under and turn over logs and to collect grubs, spiders and worms in preparation for making terraria, you can see he is enjoying it as much as the Ranger group. He's the leader — "really dig at those logs...see how they crumble? What are you finding?" — yet he's relishing the chance to watch these "young men and women" learn by doing, even as he did himself during childhood summers with his cousins at his grandparents' river home.

No wonder he was given this year's Interpretive Excellence Award.

Mike has rules — "I ask them to talk in good English, no slang or cursing. They need to work together and share what they've found." This structure has allowed a child with autism to thrive there, accepted by his peers who can see his special needs. And Mike holds him to the same standard of responsibility that he expects from all his Rangers.

Hidden Pond works with teachers as a way to expand on the elements in the state's Standards of Learning (SOL). As a program leader, Mike has long-running relationships with teachers at many nearby elementary and high schools.

"I admire teachers. They have a hard road to travel. We should be there for them as a resource, to give them a hand. We're glad to tailor a program to meet an SOL requirement. I'm always glad to see a teacher who wants to do more."

Programs on geology, microscopic organisms and pond studies all are school programs given at Hidden Pond. The site also works with seventh-grade teachers on biology and life sciences. For the third grade, Hidden Pond offers a "great" program on animal evidence, according to Mike.

Right now, life is good. Mike's first Rangers are now in college, and many are on track to pursue careers in the natural sciences. The bumper crop will be coming along over the next five years. That's fine with Mike.

"One day I'm going to be an old guy, and I'm going to want the young people in charge of running things to be keeping watch on natural resources. I want them to value and protect them. And hey, maybe one of them will give me a job in my post-retirement years."



How Does Scott's Run?

By Marty Smith, Assistant Manager, Riverbend Park

Scott's Run Nature Preserve is one of only two nature preserves in the Fairfax County Park Authority's holdings. It is a remarkable place of rare plants and splendid beauty. Yet that same beauty is being challenged by urban pollution problems and human destruction. It is a poignant match-up that has many people concerned.

A grove of ancient hemlocks, whose ancestors migrated here during the last ice age, stands in the nature preserve as a reminder that this region was once sub-arctic in its climate. A major fault zone cuts right through the park, a relic of a much more distant past some 520 and 570 million years ago when the rocks were created out of slabs of ocean floor pushed up onto this continent.

Visitors have flocked to Scott's Run for years to witness the spring wildflowers that grow there. Trailing arbutus, Virginia bluebells and trillium blooming on the steep hillsides create a small oasis of rare and fragile plants. Remarkable and rare species grow along the precipitous cliffs, in steep valleys and throughout the mature hardwood forest of very large oak and beech trees, ancient hemlock and wild cherry trees that stand as tall as the oaks.

Hiking the trails of Scott's Run can be challenging, requiring a harder constitution than possibly any other park in Fairfax County. There are two entrances into the valley park, one along the stream and the other leading to the bluffs above the river. Some trails are gentle and wind quietly through the forest. Other trails require hiking up and down very steep hills and cliffs.

The trails down the bluffs to the Potomac River are sheer in many places, and visitors must very carefully pick their way down the rocky cliffs. This ruggedness is part of the charm of Scott's Run, creating almost a paradox between the rugged terrain and the fragile beauty of the blankets of wildflowers.

Ironically, the beautiful creek that spills over the waterfall right before it enters the Potomac River actually starts directly below the parking lots of Tyson's Corner Shopping Center which sits atop a very large ancient gravel deposit that is the highest spot in Fairfax County. Flowing east, through many business parks and condominium complexes, it ends its journey at the waterfall.

But Scott's Run's beauty is what also brings its problems. People flock to the waterfall during hot weather to swim and bathe. Swimming is against the law at Scott's Run, however, because many sources of pollution make it potentially hazardous to human health. Storm runoff in the Tyson's Corner area washes human and animal waste into the creek. Mountain bikers and horseback riders illegally add to the wastes. Park and animal control staff work together to try to enforce the countywide leash law.

Other degradation is also taking place at Scott's Run. Wildflower poachers dig up the fragile flowers blooming within the park. In fact, they dug up the only stand of yellow lady-slipper orchids from Scott's Run, removing one of the rarest and most beautiful plants found in Fairfax County. Yet it remains a wonderfully rich site for interpretative programs.

Threats to Scott's Run Nature Preserve are extremely troubling to Park Authority staff and to residents, who also keep a careful watch on the park. In fact, it is in response to their concerns that the Board of Supervisors has provided funding for more part-time help to watch over the reserve. It is unique in the region and a special spot for many regular visitors. The stewardship question echoes the challenge its appellation implies: can we indeed "Preserve" it?

Scott's Run Nature Preserve is at 7400 Georgetown Pike in McLean, just outside the beltway. You may want to join the free Wildflower Walk — Bluets and Buttercups on April 6 from 9 to 11 am from the west parking lot to hike the rocky trails of this peaceful park to see and identify beautiful blooms. Please call 703-759-3211 for reservations or more information. 🌱

Scott's Run beautiful waterfall carries water potentially hazardous to humans, reflecting the challenges of natural resource protection.



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www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources.htm

YOUR PARKS

Here are some of the parks where spring is at its finest!

Ellanor C. Lawrence Park
 5040 Walney Road, Chantilly
 Call 703-631-0013

Sully Historic Site
 Sully Road, Chantilly
 Call 703-437-1794

Green Spring Gardens Park
 4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria
 Call 703-642-5173

Hidden Oaks Nature Center
 7701 Royce Street, Annandale
 Call 703-941-1065

Hidden Pond Nature Center
 8511 Greeley Blvd., Springfield
 Call 703-451-9588

Huntley Meadows Park
 3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria
 Call 703-768-2525

Riverbend Park
 8700 Potomac Hills Street
 Great Falls
 Call 703-759-9018

Colvin Run Mill
 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls
 Call 703-759-2771

Frying Pan Park
 2709 West Ox Road, Herndon
 Call 703-437-9101

Scotts' Run Nature Preserve
 7400 Georgetown Pike, McLean
 Call 703-759-3211

Roundtree Park
 3320 Annandale Road, Falls Church

Lake Accotink Park
 7500 Accotink Park Rd., Springfield
 Call 703-569-3464

Need directions? More information?
 Visit us online at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks

Spring Surprises

Green Spring Getaways

A wonderful series of spring bus tours has been designed to introduce you to great gardens and historic sites found in the mid-Atlantic area. Tours will include well-known gardens big and small, behind-the-scene tours, lesser-known gardens, historic sites and much more. For information, schedule and reservations, contact Green Spring Gardens Park at 703-642-5173.

Great Falls Day

The Great Falls Grange and the Old Schoolhouse will come alive on Saturday, April 20, with exhibits and children's activities in the historic buildings under the huge oak trees. A sale of native plants, sponsored by the Friends of Riverbend Park, will run from 8:30 am to 1 pm. Part of a larger Great Falls Community Festival, the activities, which run from 11 am until 4 pm, are free. Call 703-750-1598 for more information.

Walney Visitor Center 20th Anniversary

Join the staff and friends of Ellanor C. Lawrence Park on Saturday, May 18, in celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the opening of Walney Visitor Center. From 11 am to 3 pm, enjoy free site tours, archeological exhibits, farm animal displays, civil war reenactors, children's activities, raptor and reptile presentations, ice cream making and more.

Bobolinks in the Countryside

On Friday, May 10, from 9 am to 2 pm, travel to southern Maryland with a stop in Lucketts, VA, to view flocks of bobolinks making their way north. Other possible sightings in the rural rocky countryside include white-crowned sparrows and upland sandpipers. In Maryland, we'll look for loggerhead shrikes, blue grosbeaks and possibly a dickcissel. Reservations are required by May 3 through Riverbend Visitor Center at 703-759-9018.



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